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## Teacher Perceptions of Parental Incarceration and Its Influence on Children's Academic Success

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**TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL INCARCERATION AND ITS  
INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Early Childhood and Family Development

By

Amber L. Hooper

May 2019

# **TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL INCARCERATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

Early Childhood and Family Development

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## **ABSTRACT**

A child's educational fulfillment is often supported by the stability of parents being present in a child's life. Children's academic learning can be reinforced by parents taking an active role in promoting their child's education. When a parent is incarcerated, the child can be left without a support person for their academic success. This may lead to behavior problems in school and the increased chance at academic failure and grade retention. The separation of a parent in a child's early education years may have effects that last into adulthood and set the stage for intergenerational incarceration. This study examined teachers' perceptions of children's academic experiences after parental incarceration by surveying teachers in early education grades (preschool through third grade) and interviewing one teacher regarding her experiences teaching students with an incarcerated parent. This study found that teachers with students who have an incarcerated parent felt that children need support from their teacher when it came to children expressing their feelings, and teachers' opinions differed on whether continued communication with the incarcerated parent on educational matters was beneficial. Children with incarcerated parents need emotional support from their teacher; therefore, teachers need training on how best to support students navigating parental incarceration.

**KEYWORDS:** parental incarceration, academics, learning, success, grade retention, school, early education

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May 2019

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the following people for their support and guidance on this thesis project. Foremost, my thesis committee chair, Dr. Elizabeth King because without her input, encouragement, and guidance this thesis would never have reached its full potential. I would also like to thank my committee members; Dr. Cemore Brigden and Dr. Test for taking time out of their busy schedules as professors to be on my committee. I would also like to thank the schools and child care programs for taking part in my research surveys.

I dedicate this thesis to my family.

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## INTRODUCTION

Parental incarceration has been an increasing problem in today's society. In the past two decades, the growth of the prison population in the United States has increased 500% (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016), and the number of children with a parent in prison has doubled since 1991 (Horn, 2002). According to the Pew Charitable Trusts (2010), there are an estimated 2.7 million children in the United States with an incarcerated parent, amounting to 1 in 28 children. Beginning in the 1990s, child development professionals began to take a closer look at children with incarcerated parents, as children began presenting with adverse reactions due to their experiences of separating from a primary caregiver who was serving prison time (Seymour, 1998); this led to an increase in literature and research examining the effects of parental incarceration. According to McQuaide and Ehrenreich (1998), children with an incarcerated parent have shown maladaptive behaviors such as withdrawing emotionally in school, truancy, drug abuse, decreased academic performance, and disruptive behavior. These behaviors sometimes continue into adolescence with children being at an increased risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system themselves.

Much of the current literature on how parental incarceration affects students' experiences in schools focuses on the immediate effects such as school dropout or school discipline. Some of the issues researchers have explored are that of grade failure (Cho, 2009), school dropout (Cho, 2011), low G.P.A (Foster & Hagan, 2009), and academic underperformance (Travis & Waul, 2004). Murray and Farrington (2005) noted that children with an incarcerated parent tended to score lower on standardized academic tests and to have an increased need for special education classes. Much of the literature shows how parental incarceration affects middle childhood and



young adult students, but there are not many studies that explore the experiences that early childhood teachers have with parental incarceration, nor have studies addressed teachers' perception of the influence of parental incarceration on early childhood students' academic success. Thus, the current study explored these issues with preschool and elementary school teachers.

Academic success is defined in the current study as a student reaching their full potential in the classroom and may include academic learning as well as social-emotional and behavioral outcomes, as these skills are a large part of classroom learning in the early childhood age group. Because academic success can be subjective, the current study will explore both teachers' perceptions of parental incarceration related to children's academic experiences, as well as teachers' reporting of children's grade retention, when appropriate for the age group. Grade retention is defined as a student not advancing to the next grade level because they did not meet the academic goals and requirements for completing that grade level. The purpose of this study is to examine early childhood teachers' experiences with parental incarceration as well as their perceptions of the influence of parental incarceration on children's academic success.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Parental incarceration is a challenge for children and families, as well as school and societal systems today. The statistics on parental incarceration can be staggering, as the United States has a higher rate of incarcerations than any other country in the world, and the population of incarcerated individuals is increasing (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2015). Glaze and Maruschak (2008) noted that in 2007, inmates in state and federal prisons reached 1.7 million. This is an increase from only 600,000 in 1986 (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002).

Research suggests that, in the instance of parental incarceration, the average age at which children experience their parent entering prison is 8.9 years (Kazura, 2001), and over 50% of all children with an incarcerated parent are under the age of ten (Parke & Clarke Stewart, 2001). Children with incarcerated parents make up 2.3% of the United States population, and the number of parents serving time rose 79% between 1991 and 2007 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). These numbers are even more staggering when considering the disproportionate rates of incarceration for people of color. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, incarceration rates for black males are approximately four to ten times greater than males of other races (Carsen, 2015), making parental incarceration an important issue for communities of color and the equity of our society at large. Although much of the current literature focuses on the myriad effects of parent–child separation, teachers’ perceptions of parental incarceration and student academic success are the focus of this research study. The next few sections will describe the general effects of parental incarceration, issues related to children’s academic success, and the importance of examining teachers’ perceptions of parental incarceration and children’s academic success to best understand children’s academic experiences.

## **General Effects of Parental Incarceration**

The effects of parental incarceration on young children have mostly been studied during the last three decades. Traditionally, children with incarcerated parents were often referred to as hidden victims due to both the lack of studies done and the lack of resources available to this population of children (Seymour, 1998). The subject of parental incarceration was often difficult to approach for research as some families feel embarrassed and stigmatized for having a relative incarcerated. Research has, however, illuminated ways in which parental incarceration has affected children's experience, and has focused primarily on shame as barrier for accessing resources, children's mental health, academic success issues, and grade retention. What follows includes a synthesis of such research, situating children's academic success within the context of children's experiences with shame and mental health following parental incarceration, as young children's academic success includes social-emotional and behavioral outcomes in the classroom.

**Shame as a Barrier.** One potential effect of having a parent in prison is the shame and stigmatization associated with a parent being incarcerated, thus leading to a lack of resources and support for children and families experiencing this issue. Pugh and Lanskey (2011) found that families were not likely to access support from outside agencies due to the feelings of shame and mistrust associated with revealing that one of the parents is incarcerated. These researchers noted that 72% of families visiting prisons were not receiving outside agency support of any kind, even though many of them were dealing with a myriad of issues that would warrant community help.

Due to the emotional effects parental incarceration has on some children, some parents have felt that keeping the incarceration a secret would protect the child's mental well-being.

Miller (2006) and Kampfner (1995) pointed out that keeping parental incarceration a secret can have damaging consequences for a child by causing distrust, fear, and confusion. Kampfner (1995) believed that both being separated from a parent and having to keep silent due to the potential for shame on the family would increase trauma related stress for children. In Kampfner's study, 75% of children had trauma-related stress symptoms exhibited as difficulty sleeping, concentrating, and depression. These symptoms can be fueled by a caregiver who often wants to protect the child or may be embarrassed at what the incarcerated parent has done so they make up a false story for the child to explain where the other parent has gone (Johnston, 1995). Some children may rationalize that because their parent has disappeared, they too are in danger of disappearing, or they may create a fantasy story about their parent's whereabouts. This may lead to disillusionment and emotional stress when their parent returns and they learn the truth of what occurred.

Shame can also be a barrier for early childhood teachers and not just families, thus it is meaningful to consider in the current study. Pugh and Lanskey (2011) point out that school personnel are entrusted with maintaining confidentiality and trust when it comes to dealing with private student matters, but parents may avoid giving out information regarding the parent who is incarcerated for fear of further shaming the family who may be already dealing with grief and shock over the situation. It is important in these situations for children to be able to talk about their feelings and fears with a trusted individual, and teachers can offer a unique role in this while supporting them in their sense of grief and loss as well as reassuring children affected that they need not feel ashamed. This study examines teachers' experiences with and perceptions of parental incarceration in order to gain a better view of if and how to keep lines of communication open between children, parents, caregivers, and teachers when providing educational services to

children with incarcerated parents. It is important to note that the examination of teachers' perceptions, while valuable in understanding teachers' and children's experiences, is situated within the context of potential shame as a barrier for teachers gaining information. Though shame and stigma may limit teachers learning of their students' parental incarceration, it is advantageous for research to explore what early childhood teachers perceive in these situations in order to gain further knowledge on best practices for supporting academic success of children with incarcerated parents.

**Mental Health of the Child.** Not only does research suggest that children may not receive enough academic and emotional support when their parent is incarcerated (Pugh & Lanskey, 2011) but children also tend to suffer more mental health problems than children who do not have parents who are incarcerated (Loureiro, 2010). Typically, in a stress inducing event, the body and mind must make a choice to fight, flee, or freeze. Children may not have the mental capacity to choose their fight or flight response so many times they will freeze (Loureiro, 2010). This can cause difficulty in both assimilating and attaching understanding for the event (Davis, 1999; Van Der Kolk & Saporta, 1991). Forced parent-child separation can cause children to engage in poor coping strategies, low self-esteem, and delinquent behavior as documented in related studies about parental divorce and death (Solomon & Zweig, 2006). This can be intensified in cases of parental incarceration as children also deal with unstable custody situations and social stigma (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). Anxiety has also been shown to affect children with incarcerated parents. Several studies suggest that children with incarcerated parents have an increase in anxiety symptoms, general psychological distress, and often suffer from symptoms of neuroticism (Travis & Waul, 2004; Schlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; Murray & Farrington, 2008). Children with incarcerated parents are

more likely to have a diagnosis of conduct disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder than children whose parents are not incarcerated (Phillips, Burns, Wagner, Kramer, & Robbins, 2002). Therefore, it is important to note the importance of children's mental health when researching teachers' perceptions of parental incarceration and academic success, as how children internally process the incarceration may become evident in their behavior and learning in the classroom. Discussing teacher perceptions may also bring up teachers' assessments of the child's mental health.

### **Academic Success Issues**

Academic success in this study refers to more than memorization of concepts or high scores on achievement tests. Academic success also refers to social-emotional and behavioral learning (Linares et al., 2005; Taylor & Dymnicki, 2007). The effects of parental incarceration on academic success is particularly noteworthy, as a higher rate of academic failure has been reported for children whose parents served time in prison (Trice & Breuster, 2004); thus, children's academic success is the major focus of the current study. Trice and Breuster's work examining 58 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 20 whose mothers were incarcerated found that the dropout rate of high school students with incarcerated mothers was 36%, compared to a rate of 7% for students without incarcerated mothers. The study also found that when compared to friends whose parents were not incarcerated, students with incarcerated parents were four times as likely to be given a school suspension, three times as likely to be absent, and four times as likely to be failing classes. Additionally, 25% of students in this study had been arrested and over 50% required a visit to the school for disciplinary reasons. Academic success was also examined in an early study by Friedman and Esselstyn (1965) in which teachers reported more

issues adjusting to school (issues such as schoolwork attitude and self-concept) for students who had an incarcerated father than for students who did not have an incarcerated parent. Studies by Haskins (2013), Murray and Farmington (2005), and Wakefield and Wildeman (2013) note that students with an incarcerated father had decreased cognitive skills at the age of nine and more behavior problems through their childhood than students without an incarcerated parent.

Grade retention is a specific concern with respect to children's academic success, and is a potential consequence of parental incarceration, as studies show the rates of grade retention are higher for children with parents who are incarcerated (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013; Turney & Haskins, 2014; Wildeman, 2010). Turney and Haskins (2014) assessed the rates of grade retention among elementary students after parental incarceration. The data were gathered from the Fragile Child and Families Wellbeing Study and consisted of one year, three years, and five-year surveys after a child's birth. The results from this study indicate that 23% of students with incarcerated parents were retained between kindergarten and third grade compared to only 14% of students without an incarcerated parent. The data also suggested a greater link between grade retention and incarcerated fathers than grade retention for children of incarcerated mothers. Children of fathers who are incarcerated before their children turn five years old had a greater rate of grade retention between kindergarten and third grade compared to children of the same age whose parents had never been incarcerated (Turney & Haskins, 2014).

When comparing grade retention by gender, DiPrete and Buchmann (2013) noted that young boys are more vulnerable to family upsets and disruptions. This coincided with Wildeman's 2010 study that showed a link between parental incarceration and young boys' early behavior problems. Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, and Mincy (2012) noted that the effects of parental incarceration on academics was more pronounced for children whose

fathers had resided with them before incarceration took place than for those whose fathers did not live in the same residence as the children. Additionally, the length of time for which parents are incarcerated may influence children's academic success, as a study on 4000 youth with incarcerated mothers who were incarcerated for a minimum of one month in a county jail had less grade retention and the incarceration appeared to have minimal impact on their academic performance compared to children whose mothers were incarcerated for no more than a week (Cho, 2011). This finding is not what one would expect given other studies on the subject, which may be due to methodological factors such as the time at which data were collected (i.e., directly after the incarceration compared to when the family had time to readjust to the situation).

Studies underscore the influence that socioeconomic status has on the relationship between parental incarceration and academic success. Research indicates that the statistical relationship between parental incarceration and academic failure decreases in strength when controlling for covariates such as socioeconomic status (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012), thus implying differential experiences in the relationship between parental incarceration and academic failure for children by socioeconomic status. It has been noted in other studies, however, that even if the strength of the relationship between parental incarceration and academic success differs by socioeconomic status, parental incarceration is suggested to be related to negative effects for children's academic success regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Turney & Haskins, 2014).

### **Importance of Examining Teachers' Perceptions**

In Turney & Haskins' 2014 study, the authors argued that a teacher's assessment of a child's academic progress was a greater indicator of a child's academic success than the child's



academic test scores or record of behavior problems. Academic test scores only give a small picture of how the child is learning and do not reflect behavior or the learning processes that the child undergoes, especially in preschool and elementary classrooms. Teachers observe how children learn and behave daily and therefore their assessments may be more indicative of a child's academic success than standardized test scores or formal assessments. The conclusion is significant to the proposed study, as it underscores the importance of examining teachers' perceptions of children's academic success with respect to parental incarceration.

There are a few research studies that suggest that one of the challenges facing children with incarcerated parents is the perceptions that teachers have of these students; thus, it is important to assess teachers' perceptions of parental incarceration to better understand how teachers think about these students and their academic experiences. Dallaire and Wilson (2010) conducted qualitative interviews with teachers who had students with incarcerated parents. Their findings were that teachers often witnessed the stigmatization of these students and teachers' academic expectations tended to be lower. The teachers were also presented with hypothetical vignettes describing scenarios in which a student had a parent that was away due to parental incarceration, compared to a student who had a parent that was away for other reasons. Teachers consistently responded that the students with the incarcerated parent would be less competent academically compared to the students with a parent away for another reason. Though early childhood teachers may hold bias against children with incarcerated parents, it is important to study teacher perceptions for two reasons: (a) according to research, early childhood teacher assessment of children's academic success is a reliable way to understand children's academic experiences (Turney & Haskins, 2014), and (b) exploring early childhood teachers' perceptions of teaching students with incarcerated parents (strength-based and/or deficit-based perspectives)

will help the field understand how to best support teachers working with children experiencing parental incarceration.

The statistics show that the rate of incarcerations each year has increased and, therefore, it is plausible that the number of children with an incarcerated parent is increasing. A study examining teachers' experiences with parental incarceration, as well as their perceptions of parental incarceration related to children's academic success, can help education professionals develop and offer training for educators focused on strategies to optimize learning opportunities for these students. This study asked teachers about their experiences with students who have incarcerated parents, what training they had, and whether they thought maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent was beneficial or harmful. Additionally, this study explored teachers' perceptions of their challenges and successes in supporting the academic success of children in their classroom who have experienced parental incarceration. This study used early childhood teacher questionnaire and interview methods to better understand teachers' experiences with children with incarcerated parents as well as early childhood teachers' perceptions of the academic success and challenges teaching children with incarcerated parents.

### **The Current Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore early childhood teachers' experiences with parental incarceration as well as the challenges and successes early childhood teachers describe in their supporting the academic success of children with incarcerated parents. The current study is guided by the following two research questions:

1. What experiences have early childhood teachers had regarding teaching children with incarcerated parents?

2. What are early childhood teachers' perceptions of the challenges and successes they face in supporting the academic success of children who have had or currently have an incarcerated parent.

## **METHODOLOGY**

For the early childhood education field to be better informed with respect to the ways in which parental incarceration may influence the academic success of early childhood students, it is helpful to gain information from those who directly interact with the affected population: the teachers. For this study, surveys and a follow-up interview were used to gain information to better understand connections between parental incarceration and children's academic success, and to gain teachers' perspectives regarding how to best facilitate the academic success of these children. Mills and Gay (2016) noted that "interviewers can explore and probe participants' responses to gather in-depth data about participants' experiences and feelings" (p. 550); thus, the interview provides firsthand information from those who interact with children experiencing parental incarceration. The next few sections detail the research design and data collection procedures for the current study.

### **Participants**

The participants were preschool teachers from a small Midwestern city and kindergarten through third grade teachers in a small, rural Midwestern town. There were a total of 22 teachers who participated in the survey (response rate was 88%) and one who agreed to a follow up interview. In the field of education, 18.18% had a master's degree (n=4) and the same percentage replied that they had more than 30 credit hours of college coursework. Approximately 14% of participants (n=3) had a two-year Associate of Arts or Associate of Applied Science degree and 9.09% (n=2) had a 4-year degree in early childhood, a related field, another field, or graduate school. According to the survey responses, 32% of teachers reported that they had an

early childhood teaching license (n=7). It is also worth noting that 96% of respondents (n=21) were White/European American (non-Hispanic). One-hundred percent of survey respondents were female. Regarding age demographics, 27.3% of participants were between the ages of 20-29 (n=6), 27.3% between ages of 30-39 and 40-49 (n=6), and 1% were between the ages of 60-69 (n=1); one respondent declined to state their age.

### **School Demographics**

The survey was sent to teachers employed at a Head Start program in a small Midwestern city, and to public school teachers in grades kindergarten through first grade in a small rural Midwestern town. The Head Start program assists children and families who qualify for their program and must come from families with qualifying low incomes, be in foster care, or be involved in family assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (National Head Start Association, 2019). Head Start services are provided for children from birth through age 5. They provide children and families with early childhood education, childcare, medical and dental services, and support for families such as connecting families to resources. This Head Start was designed in 1964 by the federal government to help combat poverty. This organization was designed to help support families by fostering community involvement (National Head Start Association, 2019).

The kindergarten and first grade teachers in the current study were from a small rural school district. The school district has 361 students from grades kindergarten through twelfth grade with a 12.3:1 teacher/student ratio. There are 189 males to 172 female students in the

elementary grades with 93% of the students being of White/European American ethnicity and 61% participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (Elementary Schools.org, 2019)

### **Incarceration Demographics**

Incarceration demographics for the areas vary according to economic status, race, and ethnicity. Overall, the incarceration rate in the small Midwestern city is 1.0%; however, the incarceration rate for people experiencing low income is 3.5%, and the rate for people who are both low income and African American or Black is 8.3%. The incarceration rate in the small Midwestern town is 1.0%; however, the rate for people experiencing low income is 3.5% and for those who are both low income and Black or African American it is 8.3% (Opportunity Atlas, 2019).

### **Research Design**

The study was conducted using initial surveys and a follow-up qualitative interview of teachers of preschool through third grade. The survey was the first phase of the study, in which teachers were asked about their experiences with parental incarceration, including if they have had children in their classrooms with incarcerated parent(s), if they have received training to support such students, their perceptions about supporting the academic success of children with incarcerated parents, and if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview (see Appendix A). The follow-up interview was conducted with one teacher who was aware she had taught children with incarcerated parents, allowed the researcher to contact her, and consented to be part of the interview process (see Appendix B). The interview was beneficial to assessing teacher perception, as a semi-structured qualitative interview allows a researcher to gather

information on a participant's perspective and what they have experienced rather than trying to get answers to only predetermined questions (Mills & Gay, 2016). The interview allowed the teacher to give firsthand accounts of how parental incarceration has affected the lives of their students and/or children's academic success. Teachers were an asset in the study because they keep track of student academic success throughout the school year and were most suited to discuss student academic success after parental incarceration. Interviewing a teacher who had a student with a recently or previously incarcerated parent helped the researcher notice if changes had taken place in their academic work, social-emotional skills, and classroom behaviors. The interview allowed the researcher to gain specific details regarding parental incarceration and enabled me to make inferences from that data rather than trying to obtain a clear picture from just a statistic or a response to a survey question. A journal was kept by the researcher as the interview took place to help keep track of important details and information. The interview was also audio recorded to ensure validity and help the researcher to analyze the information and reflect upon it periodically. After themes for further analysis were developed, the audio recording was listened to many times to ensure that chosen themes were representative of the comments of the interviewee.

Informed consent procedures were used in the Qualtrics survey (see Appendix C). Once a teacher was identified as having had a student with an incarcerated parent and had accepted to be contacted to set up an interview (as part of the online survey), the researcher sent an email to the teacher asking if they would like to participate in an interview regarding the effects of parental incarceration. The teacher gave consent through the use of a signed informed consent form (see Appendix D) for phase two of the study as part of the in-person interview. All data collection

methods were approved by the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB; IRB-FY2018-545, Approved May 30, 2018, see Appendix E).

Parental incarceration carries a stigma in society, so steps were taken to ensure that the identity of those interviewed and the children were protected. The researcher never saw the children of the incarcerated parent to further protect their identity. The teacher who was interviewed was explicitly informed that the child's name should not be used in their interview, and that her name was not going to be used in the study.

## **Measures**

**Questionnaire.** The online survey consisted of 22 questions. The first question explained the survey and what data was being collected and asked the respondent if they wanted to participate via informed consent procedures. If the respondent selected no, the survey immediately ended. The first few questions collected demographic information such as race, education, and age.

Following the demographic questions were closed-ended/yes or no questions seeking to answer research question one, in order to better understand the experiences teachers had teaching children with incarcerated parents. These questions included items such as “Do you have any students currently in your class with an incarcerated parent?”; “Have you had any students in the past with an incarcerated parent?”; and “Have you as an educator had training on how to support students with an incarcerated parent?”; “Do you think maintaining contact regarding the child's education with the incarcerated parent is important?” and “Have you noticed grade retention or failing test scores to be an issue with students who have an incarcerated parent? Grade retention refers to being held back a grade for poor academic performance.” These closed-ended questions



were examined to assess research question one, in order to better understand the experiences teachers had teaching children with incarcerated parents.

To address research question two, focused on teachers' perceptions of children's academic success, the questionnaire included open-ended questions such as "What are your thoughts about parental incarceration?"; "What kinds of behaviors have you noticed from students who have an incarcerated parent?"; "What advice do you have for future educators who may be faced with a student who has an incarcerated parent?" Additionally, several of the closed-ended questions (described above) included a sub-section in which participants could write in their thoughts; these open-ended responses were also analyzed to address research question two. The final questions asked the survey respondent if they would be open to participating in a follow up interview and, if they consented, asked for contact information where they could be reached.

**Interview.** To analyze research question two in further depth, there was one interview conducted with one early childhood teacher. The interview was audio-taped so that the researcher could refer to these tapes for further analysis and reflection. According to Mills & Gay (2016), a recording of an interview ensures the researcher that the original data are always readily available. This minimizes the researcher having to take thorough notes and potentially miss an important point in the interview. At the beginning of the interview, the early childhood teacher was asked a grand tour question to describe her perceptions of the challenges and successes she had experienced regarding supporting the academic success of children with incarcerated parents. Some of the follow-up probing interview questions asked were:

- Have there been increases in disciplinary behavior for the student? Describe them.
- How has the academic work and test scores of this student changed since parental incarceration happened?
- Does the student mention the incarcerated parent in their daily conversations?

- Has the overall demeanor and personality of the student changed since the incarceration? Describe how.

The follow up interview was completed with a Head Start teacher. She had been a Head Start teacher for over five years. She was able to discuss her perceptions of parental incarceration from a unique perspective, as she had a current student with an incarcerated parent, had a student three years ago with an incarcerated parent, and had experiences with parental incarceration herself as a child when her father was incarcerated. She discussed her perceptions of this lived experience regarding all three situations.

### **Phenomenological Lens**

This study used a phenomenological approach to assess the open-ended survey questions and the interview with the teacher. According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological study helps to describe the meaning for a group of people regarding their shared experiences that they have lived as it pertains to a concept or a phenomenon. A study of this type typically begins with the researcher describing what all the participants have in common. In this study, for example, it is that of these early childhood teachers who have taught students with an incarcerated parent, and who live in a small city or town in the Midwest. The researcher then collects data from this group and uses the data to develop a description that describes what they experienced and how they experienced the situation. There are three types of phenomenological studies; this research study employs hermeneutical phenomenology. This type of phenomenology allows the researcher to take a phenomenon and reflect on themes related to it and the essence of the lived experience. The reason this study was conducted using a phenomenological approach is because it was deemed the most appropriate way to understand teachers' perceptions of the successes and

challenges they face in supporting children's academic success after parental incarceration, by looking in-depth at the subject of parental incarceration from the perception of teachers responsible for teaching these children.

The interview was transcribed into a narrative for analyses. The analysis of the interview was coupled with the qualitative data collected from the online surveys. The interview was compared alongside the survey and the themes that emerged were central to both the survey and interview responses. First, each survey response was read through several times for basic information gathering purposes. This was to help the researcher get a basic idea of how teachers responded to each of the questions. Then, each response was analyzed by making a list of descriptive words used by the survey respondents in response to each question and these words were circled so that they could be referred to later. This helps to further attach meaning to a shared experience as directed in completing phenomenology studies, according to Creswell (2007). For example, one question in the survey asked, "What are your thoughts on parental incarceration?" Some of the responses used words and phrases such as "inconsistency and stress," "traumatic," and "confusing." These phrases were further broken down into one-word descriptions such as "stress," "confusion," and "trauma." This process was repeated for each of the open-ended questions and the interview transcript. After reviewing the texts multiple times, a list was made of all words and then further analyzed to find themes that were repeated more than three times. Significant statements were selected to best describe the experience. For this study, the themes of trauma, differences in maintaining contact, and support for students emerged as central to the lived experiences of the teachers. The second theme, maintaining contact, was further subdivided into those who were for or against teachers maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent as the divide in responses needed to be analyzed in greater depth.

When conducting and analyzing interviews, it is important to remember Wolcott's strategies for ensuring the validity of qualitative research. The prominent principle here is that of "Talk little, listen a lot.... The best advice to researchers is to be patient and allow respondents time to respond. Avoid being your own best informant" (Gay & Mills, 2016, p. 552). It is important not to start forming opinions early in the research process but to wait until all the interviews have been completed and to compare the audio and the reflective journal to separate out facts from simple opinions of the researcher. The interview was transcribed into a narrative to aid in data analyses and significant statement selection to include as results. The data were analyzed to see if common themes and trends emerged over the course of the interview, coupled with themes that emerged from the open-ended survey responses.

## RESULTS

The current study examined teachers' experiences with parental incarceration as well as their perceptions of the challenges and successes they face in supporting children's academic success. Data were gathered through the use of a survey, which included open and closed-ended questions regarding teachers' experiences with and perceptions of supporting the academic success of students with an incarcerated parent. Additionally, an interview with one teacher provided an in-depth account of her perceptions. First, responses to the closed-ended questions were examined to explore research question one regarding what experience teachers had regarding teaching children with incarcerated parents, and to provide descriptive detail of the teachers in the study. Results indicate that all teachers had previously or were currently teaching a child with incarcerated parents, though few had received training on how to support children with incarcerated parents. Interestingly, responses regarding the importance of the teacher maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent were divided; this division emerged as a central theme from the open-ended questions as well.

The responses to open-ended questions, as well as the interviews were analyzed to examine the second research question, focused on teachers' perceptions of the challenges and successes they face in supporting the academic success of children with incarcerated parents. In keeping with the parameters of a phenomenology study, the qualitative data were examined for themes that related to teachers' shared experiences and perceptions of parental incarceration. When the data from the survey and interview were analyzed into themes, the following three themes emerged: trauma, differences in maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent, and

support for students. The second theme regarding maintaining contact revealed a divide among the respondents, which will be discussed further.

### **Teachers' Experience with Parental Incarceration**

To examine research question one regarding teachers' experience, a questionnaire asked if they have had experiences with students who have incarcerated parents, what training they had, and whether they thought maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent was beneficial or harmful. Of the 22 responses, 76.2% (n=17) noted that they currently had a student with an incarcerated parent while 100% of respondents noted that they have had a student in the past with an incarcerated parent. All respondents indicated that the students with an incarcerated parent were either currently enrolled or were enrolled within the last three years except for three who declined to state their answers to this question. Only 20% of respondents (n =5) noted that they had been given training on how to support students who have an incarcerated parent. One respondent indicated that their training covered "several aspects of this from emotional and behavioral support to working with children from different socio-economic backgrounds, etc." When it came to maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent, 56% (n=12) indicated yes they thought the teacher maintaining contact with the parent was important, while 33.3% (n=6) indicated that they disagreed. Twenty-seven percent (27.8%, n = 7) of respondents indicated that they had noticed grade retention and failing test scores to be a factor with children who have an incarcerated parent. It is important to note that grade retention is only relevant for some participants in the current study as grade retention is not addressed in preschool settings. Because grade retention is an important theme in the literature on parental incarceration, it was included in the current study, but the low number of participants who reported this may be due to its

relevance in the preschool age group. One respondent agreed to a follow up interview. This quantitative and descriptive information also provides the reader more detail about the group of teachers included in this study.

### **Teachers' Perceptions of Challenges and Successes in Supporting Academic Success**

Phenomenological analyses were used to address research question two regarding teachers' perceptions of supporting the academic success of children with incarcerated parents. Academic success in the current study was defined broadly to include any aspects of children's success in the classroom context that teachers deemed important, including both academic learning as well as social-emotional and behavioral indicators.

After examining 22 survey responses to open-ended questions plus an additional follow up interview, three major themes emerged from the results with respect to teachers' perceptions of the challenges and successes they face in supporting the academic success of children with incarcerated parents. These themes are trauma, differences in maintaining contact with incarcerated parent, and support for children of incarcerated parents.

**Trauma.** Participant responses were examined for key words and phrases that described teachers' perceptions of supporting children with incarcerated parents. Some key phrases used throughout the survey and the interview were "hurting people hurt people," "confusing," "fear that they would be taken from me again," and "inconsistency and stress." These key words and phrases were examined and broken down further to find one overall descriptive word to describe the shared experience to the question (see Table 1). For the overarching theme, the word that best described the theme was "trauma." This word was chosen as it was the most impactful and overarching term to explain many of the teachers' perceptions of a challenge in supporting

children’s academic success following parental incarceration. Respondents noted that “they (the incarcerated parent) suffer consequences, and unfortunately the families do too.” It was also noted by one teacher that “it puts a strain on the home life and can cause a student to behave differently.” The participant who engaged in the follow up interview noted in their survey that “as someone whose parent was incarcerated, I understand how confusing it can be. People use the phrase ‘bad people’ when talking about those in jail or prison. I thought I was wrong to continue to love someone who was bad.” In the follow up interview, this participant went on to discuss some of her experiences with working with children who have incarcerated parents and her own experience of having an incarcerated parent. She recounted a story of how in fourth grade a very religious student in her class said that she should not be around her incarcerated dad “because he was a sinner.”

Table 1. Analysis Leading to Trauma Theme Emerging

Phrases from Surveys and Interview	Groupings	Final Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Sad for all involved”</li> <li>• “hurting people hurt people”</li> <li>• “so hard on the child”</li> <li>• “understand how confusing it can be”</li> <li>• “bad people”</li> <li>• “scary to visit parent in prison”</li> <li>• “fear that they would be taken from me again” after being released</li> <li>• “causes traumatic experiences”</li> <li>• “feel guilty”</li> <li>• “really hard on some children”</li> <li>• “puts a strain on home life”</li> <li>• “Negatively effects students’ perceptions of themselves”</li> <li>• “not easy for the child”</li> </ul>	Sad Hurting Hard Scary Fear Trauma Really hard Negative	Trauma



**Maintaining Contact with the Incarcerated Parent.** There was a divide in participant the responses regarding whether it was beneficial for an incarcerated parent to maintain contact with the teacher regarding their child's academic success. In this study, maintaining contact referred to a teacher maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent regarding the child's academic success, but some respondents chose to discuss the child maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent as well. One respondent noted that "it helps keep a bond between them...It lets the parent keep their role as parent as much as possible in their situation." Another respondent noted that "children need both parents. Including an incarcerated parent is beneficial for both the child and the parent and may improve quality of life for both-working toward a better future." A couple respondents answered that "any contact with parents is vital to a child in early childhood, as long as it is monitored accordingly" and "if the parent has current contact with the child via emails or phone calls, then I feel the parent should know what is going on with the child's learning."

Though maintaining contact was the overall theme, this theme is best described in terms of two subthemes as the participants had different viewpoints regarding their perceptions of this shared experience (see Table 2). Respondents on the positive side of maintaining contact (those who indicated it was important to continue contact) seemed to consider this issue from two vantage points: that maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent could be beneficial to the parent or beneficial to the child. In the areas of maintaining contact being beneficial to the parent, some respondents made statements such as, "It is especially important if the parent will be getting out during the child's school years. It lets the parent keep their role as parent as much as possible in their situation." In the area of being beneficial to the child, one survey respondent

said, “Depending on certain situations, but in most cases I think it is important to have the parent involved no matter what the situation is. Children need both parents.” The participant in the follow up interview agreed with these statements and said, “It allows a parent access and gives an incarcerated parent a reason to still be accountable in some way.”

On the other hand, some participants stated that they felt that the child’s academic success would not benefit from teachers being in contact with the incarcerated parent. One respondent noted, “I think if it is relayed to the incarcerated parent, that the child is having behaviors, it is very likely that the incarcerated parent would not know how to properly deal with the situation and may make it worse for the child.” Similar statements such as “if the parent has not requested to be kept up to date...or the parent’s actions were against the child (abuse, neglect, etc.), then they don’t need to be kept up to date and can rely on the child’s caregiver to communicate with them.” The sentiment that parent communication does not need to occur if the offenses are against the child in any way was shared by several of the survey respondents. Some of the survey respondents answered that “the parent needs to work on himself and change their behaviors first.”

**Support for Students’ Academic Success.** When asked about the kinds of classroom behaviors witnessed from students with an incarcerated parent and what advice they have for future educators to facilitate the academic success of children with incarcerated parents, the theme of support emerged from many of the survey respondents (see Table 3). Though many terms were used by participants that illustrated this theme, “support” was the term most closely aligned to the overarching perceptions teachers were voicing. Teachers’ perceptions of their challenges and successes facilitating the academic success of children with incarcerated parents centered around children’s need for support. For example, one respondent noted that “sometimes

Table 2. Analysis Leading to Maintaining Contact Theme Emerging

Phrases from Surveys and Interview	Groupings	Final Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “helps keep a bond between them”</li> <li>• “any contact with parents is vital in early childhood”</li> <li>• “depend on the circumstance”</li> <li>• “important to have the parent involved no matter what”</li> <li>• “important...in my instance the parent was very involved”</li> <li>• “No...they can contact the teacher.”</li> <li>• “both parents could be included...encourage both parents to be involved... responsibility shared”</li> <li>• “parent has the right to know how their child is doing in school”</li> <li>• “if parent has requested.... they should be kept up to date”</li> <li>• “not...not involved in first place...and does not care.”</li> <li>• “scared to do so...should not be incarcerated in the first place”</li> <li>• “There isn’t anything they can do about it.”</li> <li>• “Parent needs to focus on himself”</li> </ul>	<p><u>Positive focused:</u>  “helps keep a bond”  “Any contact with parents is vital”  Important to have parent involved no matter what”  “both parents should be included...encourage to stay involved...share responsibility  “parent has the right to know how their child is doing in school”  “if parent has requested, they should be kept up to date”</p> <p><u>Negative focused:</u>  “no...they can contact the teacher”  “not...not involved in first place...and does not care.”  “scared to do so...should not be incarcerated in the first place”  There isn’t anything they can do about it.”  “Parent needs to focus on himself”</p>	<p>Positive perception of maintaining contact</p> <p>Negative perception of maintaining contact</p>

they just need to talk about it or have someone acknowledge that their parent is gone.... sometimes need extra emotional support.” Many similar statements such as “be caring and loving

of the situation,” “try to be supportive of whatever feelings the child is having,” “listen to the child, and “try to be patient and try to understand the cause of the behaviors were seen.” The participant in the follow up interview noted that children need to know that “all feeling are okay, and it is also okay to feel happy that they (the incarcerated parent) are gone.” She also stated that it is important to “give the kid any opportunity to talk about it and let out anxiety/guilt over emotions.” She said that teachers need “to have a level of honesty when talking about the situation with the child.”

Table 3. Analysis Leading to Support Theme Emerging

Phrases from Surveys and Interview	Grouping	Final Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “sometimes just need to talk about it, sometimes just need extra emotional support”</li> <li>• “Be understanding of the situation and individual child needs”</li> <li>• “be patient and stay in contact with parent at home”</li> <li>• “each child and situation are different”</li> <li>• “be sensitive to child’s needs”</li> <li>• “be patient and understanding of cause of behaviors”</li> <li>• “try to be a positive in their life:</li> <li>• “listen to the child”</li> <li>• “be caring and loving of the situation”</li> </ul>	Talk Emotional support Understanding Patient Sensitive Patient Understanding Positive Listen Caring Loving	Support

## **Validity and Reliability**

Conducting research must include validity and reliability protocols to ensure that data are collected and analyzed using methods that are considered reliable and trustworthy. It is important to use multiple phenomenological methods to assess for validity and reliability. In this research study, the two methods of “triangulation” and “rich, thick description” were used to address validity, and audio-recording, transcription, and discussion of themes were used to address reliability (Creswell, 2007).

**Validity.** To ensure findings were grounded in participants’ lived experiences, “triangulation” and “rich, thick description” were employed to address validity. Triangulation refers to the research making use of multiple and different resources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2007). Multiple methods were used in this research study to collect different types of information from participants, including surveys and an interview. Additionally, the discussion of the findings with multiple investigators (the chair and the committee) provided an opportunity to corroborate evidence. The evidence collected and conclusions drawn are also corroborated with previous literature regarding parental incarceration (see the discussion section).

The second test for validity used in the current study was “rich, thick description” (Creswell, 2007, p. 209). This allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability. In studies using rich, thick description, the researcher describes what the participants have done in detail or describes the setting of the study. This allows readers to examine the data and see if the data can be transferred based on shared characteristics. This study describes, in detail, the demographics of the schools in which teachers worked, as well as the incarceration rates of the

area in which the data were collected, to add depth in understanding of the setting of the study. Information on participant demographics and experiences also provided detailed description of the teachers who participated.

**Reliability.** To address reliability, multiple methods were used. For qualitative research, reliability is concerned with the stability of response of the researcher developing the themes as well as others corroborating the themes (Creswell, 2007). To address this, first, the researcher audio-recorded the interview to be able to go back and listen to the words multiple times both during and after the interview was transcribed. Second, the themes were discussed with another researcher to provide an external check of the coding process.

**Overall Evaluation.** The current study was evaluated using Creswell's (2007) standards of evaluating phenomenological research. The author understands the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology and has implemented both appropriate data collection and analysis. Additionally, the phenomenon of early childhood teachers working with children with incarcerated parents is described through the voices of the teachers themselves. The researcher chose a clear phenomenon (that of early childhood teachers teaching children with incarcerated parents) and this is examined by using phenomenology to answer two main questions that included teachers' experiences of teaching students with incarcerated parents and their perceptions of the challenges and successes children with incarcerated parents face as it pertains to academic success. In addition, the researcher used clear procedures of data analysis as it pertains to phenomenology such as looking for themes common to the shared experience of the participants and then analyzing these themes further.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined teacher perceptions of parental incarceration and children's academic success. The two main components that this explored were what experiences teachers had with supporting students who have incarcerated parents, including if they have had children with incarcerated parents as well as any training they received, and what teachers perceived to be the challenges and successes they face when guiding the academic success, including social-emotional and behavioral outcomes, of students with incarcerated parents. As classroom learning in early childhood education contexts is focused both on academic learning as well as social-emotional and behavioral skills, the current study defined academic success to include not only academic indicators such as teachers' report of grade retention, but an in-depth description of teachers' perceptions of children's social and behavioral factors relevant to early childhood classrooms.

To examine teachers' experiences with supporting children with incarcerated parents, surveys were sent out to teachers in grades kindergarten through first grade in a public elementary school and to preschool teachers in Head Starts. Of the teachers who responded to the survey, over three quarters currently had a student with an incarcerated parent and every respondent had a student in the past with an incarcerated parent. Many teachers noted that they had not received training regarding how to support students with an incarcerated parent. This finding is alarming because this lack of training could hinder teachers' ability to support the academic success of young children in their classrooms. Murray and Farmington (2008) noted that schools can be the location where students with an incarcerated parent may experience stigma, failed academic success, and engage in risky behaviors. This can lead to teachers needing

to engage in intervention for this type of behavior. The fact that every single participant in the survey reported having a student in the past with an incarcerated parent is paramount to the statistics on the increasing numbers of parental incarceration. Both Krisberg and Temin (2001) and the Child Welfare League of America (2004) noted research that describes the United States prison population as growing 3.8% annually within the last two decades and affecting an estimated 1.5 to 2 million children nationwide.

Regarding the second research question, trauma was a central theme that emerged from the survey responses and interview in this research study. Many teachers noted that having an incarcerated parent caused anxiety, guilt, or stress to students. When engaging in academic learning in preschool environments, trauma can hinder a child's learning and academic progress. In child development, the topic of resiliency is relevant to discussing stress in the child's environment or various traumas that can occur in a child's life. According to research by Masten and Coatsworth (1998), resiliency refers to achievement of developmental milestones even in the presence of a significant threat to the child's development. With parental incarceration, there are myriad of issues that may develop once the parent is no longer living at home. For example, an incarcerated parent could mean the loss of income and reduced socioeconomic status with the extreme being homelessness as a factor. Another issue is stigma from society in the form of friends, other family members, and peers and teachers at school after the parent is incarcerated. Finally, there is a loss of a significant relationship in the child's life particularly if the incarcerated parent was present in the child's life before being incarcerated. Resiliency can lead to a child overcoming the trauma associated with parental incarceration if there are certain protective factors in place that help mitigate the negative influences of having an incarcerated parent. A protective factor pertaining to the current study may be a teacher who provides



emotional support to the child. Many of the participants conveyed that children in this situation need support from teachers as they navigate the many feelings and emotions that can come with having a parent incarcerated, as support was a major theme that emerged from teachers. Support from the school system during a parent's imprisonment can be an asset and protective factor to both the child and prisoner. It may be important for schools to help foster the parent-child contact for the parent who is incarcerated by involving them in their child's education.

The participants in the study did not have unanimous views regarding contact with the incarcerated parent; in this study, teachers described both the teacher maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent as well as the child maintaining contact with their parent. Regarding contact between the parent and the child, some teachers felt that maintaining contact kept the incarcerated parent accountable to the child in some way and provided incentive to work on getting out of prison so that they could have a relationship with the child. Research by Sack, Seidler, and Thomas (1976) found that maintaining contact between incarcerated parent and child resulted in children who exhibited fewer behavioral problems and overall improvement.

Several teachers also described contact between teacher and incarcerated parent. Involving the incarcerated parent in the child's education may take some creativity between the school, early childhood teacher, and prison but can be beneficial as discussed by Sullivan (2017) and can take the form of video conferences. Research by Roberts (2012) noted that teachers involving the incarcerated parent in the child's education does not have to be a challenging task as many schools already send out multiple copies of students' work and progress reports in the cases of divorced or separated parents.

## **Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. Because the study focused on issues teachers see in their classroom contexts specifically, the results of the current study do not address all factors that parental incarceration may affect, including socioeconomic issues such as decreased household resources and money for food, which could lead to children having difficulty concentrating and may lead to decreased academic success. Additionally, because only one participant agreed to a follow up interview, more interviews would be needed to get a more in-depth picture of teacher perceptions of this phenomenon.

## **Implications**

The findings suggest that teachers witness children's experience of a parent being incarcerated, given all teachers in this group had taught a child with an incarcerated parent. However, few teachers indicated they had received training on how to best support children with incarcerated parents; therefore, teacher training and professional development on how to help support children facing this challenge could be an asset to schools and educational professionals. By having more training available, the parents and caregivers who are not incarcerated may feel more comfortable and open to discussing the situation with teachers and may thus receive access to more support and resources, if they feel that the teacher is less likely to harbor stigma toward the child based on their parent being incarcerated. Research by Dallaire and colleagues (2010) found evidence that teachers had witnessed the stigmatization of children with incarcerated parents by other educational professionals and they also tended to have lower academic expectations for these children than for children without incarcerated parents. Being more aware

of the effects of parental incarceration on young children may facilitate teacher understanding regarding lowered academic success and behavior problems in the classroom. This can spark a conversation on how to minimize these effects and lead to communication between parent and teacher on how best to support the child during this time.

Maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent regarding the child's education may have benefits for both the child and the incarcerated parent (Loucks, 2004). In the current study there was a division between teachers on this issue; however, literature on the subject suggests that it can be beneficial to maintain contact and communication. One way schools can facilitate contact between children and their incarcerated parent is by sending progress reports, newsletters, and examples of the child's work to the parent. Another way to maintain contact is through the teacher engaging in telephone calls, video chats, or even one-on-one meetings to discuss the students' academic success and any problems or concerns. This continued connection between parent and child may help decrease the shame and stigma children feel regarding their parent's imprisonment; for the prisoner it encourages them to keep being involved with their child's education which fosters a continued relationship that is suggested to make them less likely to re-offend once released (Loucks, 2004).

Another implication from this research study is the need for school systems to facilitate teachers' ability to provide support to students, as teachers frequently discussed their need to provide support for children's success in the classroom. While training needs to be provided to teachers on how to navigate children's behaviors that may arise as a result of the stress and trauma from parental incarceration, it is important to remember that students also need support and acknowledgment of their emotions and feelings during this time as well. According to research by the Idaho Criminal Justice Commission (2012) children of incarcerated parents need

support in several ways and “benefit from services and supports that reduce the stigma, shame and trauma of parental incarceration, bolster healthy child and adolescent development, and increase their likelihood of school success” (p. 1). Teacher support of children with incarcerated parents can help minimize trauma and shame that is felt and allows the student to know that their feelings and emotions are acknowledge and validated.

### **Future Directions**

The findings from this research study have created pathways for future research and opened the discussion for further research questions. One path for future research is to develop training programs for teachers and educational professionals about parental incarceration and then to assess their implementation in a school or Head Start to test their effectiveness. A second pathway for future research would be to assess the different attitudes as found in the current study regarding keeping communication maintained with the incarcerated parent and to develop guidelines for how to assess whether this would be beneficial to child. Future research may also be able to take a more in-depth look at the influence of parental incarceration by using a larger and more diverse sample that can look at how it influences children’s academic success by factors such as race and ethnicity.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research study was to examine teachers’ experiences with parental incarceration and their perceptions of the influence of parental incarceration on children’s academic success. The study consisted of a survey sent to teachers with the prospect of a follow up interview. The descriptive information from the survey illustrates that, though these teachers

all had taught a child with an incarcerated parent, few teachers had received training on the issue. The phenomenological lens of the study found three overarching themes that emerged from the responses in the survey and one follow up interview. Trauma was a subject that many participants felt children exhibited after the incarceration of a parent. There were differing viewpoints when it came to maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent regarding the child's education and learning, with some participants feeling it would be beneficial to the child and the incarcerated parent and others suggesting it would do more damage or harm to the child. Finally, this study found that teachers almost unanimously felt that children with incarcerated parents need support and to be able to talk about their emotions. The findings in this study can be used for further research about parental incarceration to further facilitate guidance for children and teachers who face this challenge in early childhood education settings.

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## APPENDIX A: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

### **Demographic information:**

How long have you worked in the early childhood field? Enter your answer in **years** and **months**: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you worked in your current program? Enter your answer in **years** and **months**:  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is your highest level of education?

- High school diploma or GED
- Some college coursework (less than 30 credit hours)
- Some college coursework (more than 30 credit hours)
- 2-year AA or AAS degree in Early Childhood
- 2-year AA or AAS degree in related field (e.g. Psychology)
- 2-year AA or AAS degree in another field
- 4-year degree in Early Childhood
- 4-year degree in related field (e.g. Psychology)
- 4-year degree in another field
- Some graduate school
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Decline to state

What teaching licenses do you hold?

- Early Childhood (Birth - Grade 3)
- Elementary
- Special Education
- Other, please specify:

How do you identify your racial or ethnic background? Select all that apply:

- Native American or Alaska Native
- White/European American (non-Hispanic)
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- African America/Black
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Asian or Asian Indian
- Multiethnic, please indicate how you identify: \_\_\_\_\_

Other, please indicate how you identify: \_\_\_\_\_  
Decline to state

What is your gender?

Female

Male

Other, please identify: \_\_\_\_\_

Decline to state

What is your age? If decline to state, please type 9999: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you have any students currently in your class with an incarcerated parent?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. Have you had any students in the past with an incarcerated parent?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2a. If yes, approximately how long ago did you teach this student? (open-ended)

3. Have you as an educator had training on how to support students who have an incarcerated parent?

Yes          No

If Yes, please explain what sort of training you have had (open-ended):

4. What are your thoughts about parental incarceration? (open-ended)

5. Do you think maintaining contact regarding the child's education with the incarcerated parent is important?

Yes          No

If yes, how so? If no, why not? (open-ended) \_\_\_\_\_

6. What kinds of behaviors have you noticed from students who have an incarcerated parent?
7. Have you noticed grade retention or failing test scores to be an issue with students who have an incarcerated parent? Grade retention refers to being held back a grade for poor academic performance.

Yes No

8. What advice do you have for future educators who may be faced with a student who has an incarcerated parent?
9. Would you be willing to participate in a research study about your experiences that involves 1 interview session outside school of approximately 1-2 hours in length? The identity of the child and family will not be revealed in the study and each teacher interviewed will be given an ID number or pseudonym to further protect anonymity.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please provide your contact information so we can get in touch with you to

schedule the interview at a time best for you:

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B: TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How long has your student had an incarcerated parent?
2. If you knew the child before incarceration of their parent took place, how was the academic work and test scores of your student before parental incarceration took place?
3. How has the academic work and test scores of this student changes since parental incarceration happened?
4. Have there been increases in disciplinary behavior for the student? Describe them.
5. Does the student mention the incarcerated parent in their daily conversations?
6. Has the overall demeanor and personality of the student changed since the incarceration? Describe how.
7. Does the school have any policies on keeping incarcerated parents updated on their child's academic endeavors? What are these policies? If not, do you think policies should be in place for these kinds of situations?
8. Do you have any personal feelings or stigmas associated with parental incarceration?
9. How do you put personal feelings and stigmas aside when working with families who have an incarcerated parent?
10. Have you noticed any instances of bullying towards your student regarding their parent being incarcerated? If so, what actions were taken?
11. What is your advice to other educators who may be confronted with helping a student who has an incarcerated parent?
12. Do you know what the child's relationship was like with the parent prior to incarceration?
13. How much do you believe the child understands regarding the crime that was committed and the consequence of parental incarceration?
14. What changes have you seen in the child emotionally and socially since incarceration took place?
15. What is your advice to other teachers that may experience teaching a student with an incarcerated parent?

## **APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT PHASE 1 QUALTRICS STUDY**



**Missouri State**  
U N I V E R S I T Y

### **Informed Consent**

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

#### **Missouri State University**

#### **College of Education**

#### **The Effects of Parental Incarceration on Student Academic Success and Grade Retention**

**Dr. Elizabeth King, Principal Investigator and Amber Campbell Hooper, Investigator**

#### **Introduction**

You have been asked to participate in a research study. Before you agree to participate in this study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the study and the procedures involved. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, contact Amber Campbell Hooper. You may contact the investigator(s) at: Amber Campbell Hooper, (417-399-4226) and Dr. Elizabeth King at 417-836-6961.

By clicking “yes” you are giving your permission to be involved in the study. Taking part in this study is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. If you decide to stop, you do not have to give a reason and there will be no negative consequences for ending your participation.

#### **Purpose of this Study**

The reason for this study is to examine teachers’ experiences with children with incarcerated parents, and the effects of parental incarceration on student academic success and grade retention in student’s kindergarten through third grade. This study seeks to obtain teachers’ perspectives on their experiences of children dealing with parental incarceration using an online survey.

#### **Description of Procedures**

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to answer some questions in an online survey. This survey will be done on Qualtrics and no student names will be asked; please respond to questions using general information as to not identify children or families. You will be asked if you would like to participate in a follow up interview which is voluntary, and at that time you will provide contact information in order to schedule the interview. This information will be stored separately from the data collected.

**What are the risks?**

There are no known risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

**What are the benefits?**

You may not benefit directly from this study. However, the information from this study will help future educators who teach students with an incarcerated parent to minimize the negative effects that may result from this phenomenon.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

The results of this study are confidential and only the investigators will have access to the information which will be kept in a locked facility at the University. Unique Identifiers such as Teacher 1 from School 1, Teacher 2 from School 3, etc. will be used to protect privacy. All data downloaded from Qualtrics will be deidentified and stored on a password protected computer. Data will be destroyed two years after the completion of the research study.

**Consent to Participate**

If you want to participate in this study, The Effects of Parental Incarceration on Student Academic Success and Grade Retention survey, click “Yes.”

By clicking “yes”, you agree with the following statement: I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By clicking “yes”, I agree voluntarily to participate in this study. I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I have received a copy of this form for my own records.



## **APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT PHASE 2 TEACHER INTERVIEW**



**Missouri State**  
U N I V E R S I T Y

### **Informed Consent**

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

**Missouri State University**

**College of Education**

#### **The Effects of Parental Incarceration on Student Academic Success and Grade Retention**

**Dr. Elizabeth King, Principal Investigator and Amber Campbell Hooper, Investigator**

##### **Introduction**

You have been asked to participate in a research study. Before you agree to participate in this study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the study and the procedures involved. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, contact Amber Campbell Hooper. You may contact the investigator(s) at: Amber Campbell Hooper, (417-399-4226) and Dr. Elizabeth King at 417-836-6961.

By signing this form, you are giving your permission to be involved in the study. Taking part in this study is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. If you decide to stop, you do not have to give a reason and there will be no negative consequences for ending your participation.

##### **Purpose of this Study**

The reason for this study is to examine teachers' experiences with children with incarcerated parents, and the effects of parental incarceration on student academic success and grade retention in student's kindergarten through third grade. This study seeks to obtain teachers' perspectives on their experiences of children dealing with parental incarceration through a semi-structured interview.

##### **Description of Procedures**

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be interviewed after a school day session by the investigator, Amber Campbell Hooper. These interviews will take approximately 1 hour and will be audio recorded to ensure validity. Notes will also be made during the interview. Please respond to questions using general information as to not identify children or families. These interviews will be done after school when students are not present to protect confidentiality, or another time of your choosing.

**What are the risks?**

There are no known risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

**What are the benefits?**

You may not benefit directly from this study. However, the information from this study will help future educators who teach students with an incarcerated parent to minimize the negative effects that may result from this phenomenon.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

The results of this study are confidential and only the investigators will have access to the information which will be kept in a locked facility at the University. Unique Identifiers such as Teacher 1 from School 1, Teacher 2 from School 3, etc. will be used to protect privacy. All data will be deidentified and stored on a password protected computer. Data will be destroyed two years after the completion of the research study.

**Consent to Participate**

If you want to participate in this study, The Effects of Parental Incarceration on Student Academic Success and Grade Retention, you will be asked to sign below:

I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this form, I agree voluntarily to participate in this study. I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Printed Name of Participant

## **APPENDIX E: HUMAN SUBJECTS IRB APPROVAL**

IRB-FY2018-545 - Initial: Initial Approval

**To:** Elizabeth King  
Childhood Ed & Fam Studies

**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval

**Submission Type:** Initial

**Study #:** IRB-FY2018-545

**Study Title:** Teacher Perceptions of the Relationship Between Parental Incarceration and Children's Academic Success

**Decision:** Approved

**Approval Date:** May 30, 2018

**Expiration Date:** May 28, 2019

This submission has been approved by the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the period indicated.

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

Researchers Associated with this Project:

**PI:** Elizabeth King

**Co-PI:** Joan Test

**Primary Contact:** Amber Hooper

**Other Investigators:** Amber Hooper